



**Testimony of Claudine Wilkins-Chambers
President, AFSCME Local 3144
Program Review and Investigations Committee
SB 972: AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE
CONCERNING SCHOOL PARAPROFESSIONALS STAFFING
February 27, 2015**

Good afternoon, Senator Fonfara, Representative Carpino, and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Claudine Chambers. I am the President of AFSCME Local 3429, representing New Haven Paraprofessionals, and I am a member of the Executive Board of Council 4 AFSCME.

Council 4 AFSCME thanks this committee for raising this important issue about the staffing levels and changing responsibilities of paraprofessionals. This is my 43rd year working for the New Haven Public Schools. I do it because I love being there for the children.

There are two findings from your report that I want to highlight as they are the main issues we are seeing on the front-lines:

- 1) Paraprofessionals are not highly compensated.
- 2) Paraprofessionals perform a growing and diverse range of tasks from providing general classroom support to more individualized learning to substitute teaching.

Being a paraprofessional is a difficult job. The recommendations included in your proposed bill will help us better help the kids.

In particular, I want to thank this committee for including in this bill a requirement that Boards provide training to paraprofessionals. A lot has changed in my work over the years. We now have a lot more students with special needs. I have urged the New Haven Board of Education train us or at least include us in professional development programs provided to teachers. We want to be able to provide the individualized learning programs these students need. However, that training only happens when we as a union demand it. It is not a standard part of the school year.

To touch on a two other issues that were mentioned in the report but are not included in the proposed bill:

- With respect to Individualized Educational Plans, I can tell you from experience that paraprofessionals do not always see these or have input into them.
- With respect to substitute teaching, paraprofessionals are often called on to substitute teach *without compensation*.

To the extent these issues can also be addressed, we urge the committee to do so.

These kids deserve better. The report and this bill are important steps in the right direction.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.